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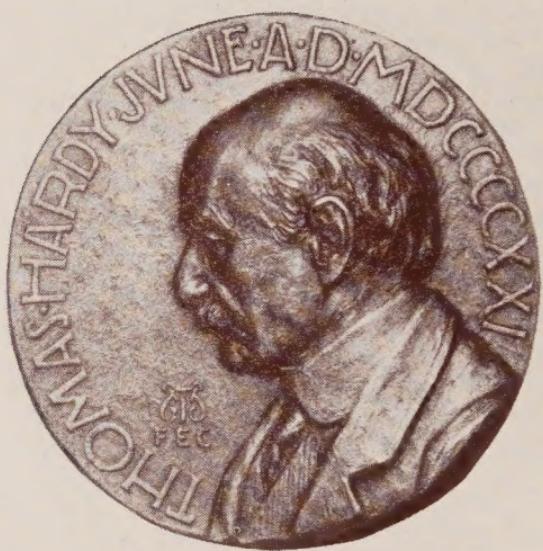


THOMAS HARDY  
*of THE WESSEX NOVELS*



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# THOMAS HARDY OF THE WESSEX NOVELS

AN ESSAY & BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE  
BY  
J. G. SIME



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## CONTENTS

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### THOMAS HARDY

*Frontispiece*

### THE ROMAN ROAD

*Thomas Hardy on Thomas Hardy*

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

### THOMAS HARDY OF THE WESSEX NOVELS

### PUBLISHER'S NOTE

158052



## THE ROMAN ROAD

*The Roman Road runs straight and bare  
As the pale parting-line in hair  
Across the heath. And thoughtful men  
Contrast its days of Now and Then.  
And delve, and measure, and compare:*

*Visioning on the vacant air  
Helmed legionaries, who proudly rear  
The Eagle, as they pace again  
The Roman Road.*

*But no tall brass-helmed legionnaire  
Haunts it for me. Uprises there  
A mother's form upon my ken,  
Guiding my infant steps, as when  
We walked that ancient thoroughfare.  
The Roman Road.*

THOMAS HARDY.



## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Thomas Hardy was born June 2nd, 1840, three years after Victoria had come to the throne; he lived through her reign, through that of her son, Edward VII, into our own Fifth-Georgian time, dying at the age of 87, on the 11th of January, 1928. Throughout this long life he lived, in a sense, to himself. No man was ever less communicative to the outer world of his inner thoughts. What he has told us in his novels and poems, we know — or each of us can make his own guess. Further than that only the most outside events of his life are chronicled : and many of them are as yet, to the general public, left unknown. There was about Thomas Hardy no hint of self-advertisement. Those who went, in the spirit of pilgrims, to visit him, often came disappointed away. For pilgrims are not always endowed with either intuitive sensitiveness or humility : and for some I have met it was not enough to look on the face of the man who had given us

## THOMAS HARDY

"The Woodlanders" and "The Return of the Native". They wished him to "talk", and to talk about Thomas Hardy; and that Thomas Hardy, to any chance new-comer, constantly refused to do.

Of the education of this unself-advertising man, little, I believe, is known. He must have been — we glean this from his books — if not what is conventionally known as a "nice" boy, an extraordinarily interesting one, and endowed with a hardly-excelled power of acquiring knowledge. Of one thing we may be certain; what Hardy knew, what he gave out to us during the whole of his later life, was never acquired at one of the great English Public Schools. His mind was never compressed into a set mould, but, in whatever way and wherever acquired his wide and varied knowledge may have been, his mental power was left free to roam and expand as it would. What he knew he knew thoroughly, and he knew what in our modern phraseology we call "a lot".

He was born in his own Wessex, near Dorchester, in the beautiful county of Dorset. When he was sixteen, he became articled to

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

an architect in the town of Dorchester. Six years later, as a young man of twenty-two, he moved to London, and, working still at architecture, he passed under the instruction of Sir A. Blamford. At twenty-three he gained a prize for an architectural design, and the Medal of the Institute of British Architects.

We gather that, throughout this time, he went through the restlessness that genius, in whatever form, can hardly escape. He must have been trying his hand at writing of different kinds, for we know that he had it in mind for a while to become an art-critic; at twenty-five, he comes into the light of authorship with some poetry; and at thirty-one he turns definitely into the long road he was to tread to the end, with the publication of his first novel "Desperate Remedies".

With the initial reception of this book, Hardy comes into touch with his great contemporary, George Meredith. Meredith was at this time (1871) Reader to Chapman and Hall. With the insight that comes from absorbed work of one's own, Meredith — most generous of mortals — as soon as the

### THOMAS HARDY

manuscript of the unknown writer came into his hands, recognized in its pages the potential powers of whatever man had written it. We can imagine the interview between the two, the young Hardy coming hesitatingly into the presence of the maturer man (Meredith was born twelve years before Hardy, in 1828). Such an interview takes us back to another meeting, when Thackeray came into the presence of his great fellow worker Charles Dickens, with his hesitating request to be allowed to illustrate the forthcoming "Pickwick". The fact that Meredith in later life grew to dislike (while always admittings its power) the work of Hardy in no way mitigates from the quick insight which enabled him to give a young untried novelist his first chance; and the warm generosity which impelled him to push to the best of his ability a coming rival's wares.

That Meredith and Hardy were rivals, at any rate in the affection of the public, I suppose nobody will deny. Meredith had — and has — his own following, even though, for the moment, he is perhaps somewhat under a cloud. It speaks for itself that Hardy

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

with his pessimistic and fatalistic strain, must, to a generation blasted by the effects of a Great War, be more congenial and more intimately studied than a Meredith whose life-work it was to tilt against all the pseudo-romance of the world. In a time where romance itself is, as with us, in abeyance, it would be waste of time to tilt at any travesty of it. Thus, at the moment, Hardy perhaps tends, as most assuredly Meredith is under-, to be slightly over-rated. But the inherent nobility of both these men as well as the strongly individual genius which characterised each, may safely be left to wind its way out of the tangles of contemporary judgments. What is worthy of life, lives — in art and in science as well as in thought and deed. No more on this subject need be said than that.

The fifty-six years which followed the publication of "Desperate Remedies" are a history of the production of Hardy's later books. There they are, more than a dozen of them, for each of us to read, re-read, ponder over, and about which each of us must come eventually to his own conclusions.

THOMAS HARDY

I have indicated in the essay which follows these words, my own ideas as to these books. My opinion does not pretend to be more than a purely personal one, differing, it may be entirely, in its selections and views, from him or her who has a like affection and admiration with myself for the books of this great man; as right as the views of these other admirers — and as wrong — my own views must of necessity be. In literary judgments, the personal point of view must be an integral part of the business. It must flavour the dish of judgment, and every cook will admit that the flavouring of the dish is not the least important adjunct in the whole.

We need not, I think, regret in any way, the years spent by Hardy in the mastering of his early trade. His study of architecture is inherent in the technical skill of the building up of all his books: his aptitude for his first profession seems to me to stand out in every page. No writer that I know gives quite the impression that he does of brick being laid to brick and stone to stone. His eye guides his hand: and it is perhaps the bent of his genius for the structure of houses that

### *BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE*

are built with hands that enables us to live with such complete contentment in those other mansions of his that are put together with the hands — the eyes and ears — the instincts too — of the mind. Hardy will remain the architect of the novel; it has been said of music that it is "frozen architecture"; I would say of Hardy that his work is living architecture — the building of life.

I may perhaps add here a small personal reminiscence. Many a long year ago I was, as a small child, and for a tremendous "treat", taken to a garden-party at the house of the publisher, Alexander, afterwards Sir Alexander, Macmillan. I played the part of a small child of the period there, making myself as far as possible unseen and little heard; and I remember with the distinctness that comes of having seen things with those eyes of youth, the sight of my father walking up and down with an unknown man — I mean, a man then unknown to me. I watched the two of them. They had detached themselves from the crowd and had withdrawn into the kitchen-garden; and there, between the rows of gooseberry bushes, the two were walking

THOMAS HARDY

up and down, in deep discourse. I don't know what it was that specially drew my eyes to them. I was at all times interested in what my father did; but I seem to remember a rather special interest on this occasion. Probably the depth of interest in the conversation that both of them were engaged in may have struck my infant mind; we must not forget what a great observer of man- and woman-kind has said, that hardly ever again in life does the mature person recover the intense and accurate observation of the child. "Observation," Charles Dickens says, "is not the newly-won possession of the grown man; it is the continued possession of him or her who has not forgotten what it is to be a child."

I watched the two. Each had his hands behind him, each walked steadily on with the gait of the man to whom the act of walking is a pleasure; each turned to the other, sometimes an earnest, sometimes a protestant, always an absorbed face, as each parried the question or observation of the other. I know not what they talked about: but it was not the usual talk of garden-

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

parties that passed between them. Afterwards my mother said to me in an awed voice, "That was Thomas Hardy!" I had not the slightest idea who Thomas Hardy was, but her tone sank into my childish mind; and I had the idea that something or other very important had happened to me. The curious thing about it is that, though this scene and my mother's tone remain impressed on me; though I can now call up before me with even more distinctness than life, as it would seem, the two moving figures; though I can recall the movements of their hands, and see their faces turning to one another; though I could draw the scene *en gros*, if I may use the expression, it would yet be impossible for me to give my impressions *en détail*. The scene I see. Hardy I see — naturally I see my father, in a different way; but if I were to be asked to indicate the colour of Hardy's hair, the setting of his eyes, the turn of his personality (if one may put it so), I should be unable to comply. I knew that what I saw was worth looking at. This conclusion I had come to before my mother spoke. But how or why it would have been

THOMAS HARDY

impossible for me to say; and though to-day I could make a sketch of the two men — yes, and of every gooseberry bush they made their way between — I could not depict the countenances of the talkers. These remain an impression on my mind — no more than that; what is permanent is the design, the extraordinary actuality of the whole. And this sharp impression, this etching of life, I shall doubtless take with me into my grave.

Of the rest there is little more to say. A fancy of mine that what of Hardy's autobiography is to be found in his work may be discovered in the early history of Stephen Smith, the young architect in that most enchanting of books, "A Pair of Blue Eyes", is after all no more than a fancy of mine. No more founded on known fact, is the companion fancy that Elfride, dear enchantress of the book, may be a lovely design of Hardy's own first wife. Each feels these things to his or her own fancy; and if I set down my notion here, it is because it is a pleasure to me to identify in my imagination Stephen and Elfride as the prototypes of

## *BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE*

Hardy himself and his own early beloved, as the two took shape and form in the mind of the great artistic creator. In this book we get the spring-time of Hardy's genius. Beautiful it is; and Elfride one of the heroines of the world.

The long life of Hardy is over. We have benefited so greatly by his being amongst us for his eighty-seven years, that our dominant feeling with regard to him must surely be one of gratitude. Gratitude for his life, for his work, for his character, for his insight, for his wonderful prose, for his deeply-searching and most beautiful verse. Whatever he was, he was a man. If he was a man of genius too, that is only so much added on to the original stem. Wessex will live in him; and — who shall say for what length of time — every man or woman who loves literature and, what is far more important, humanity, will read fascinatedly in his pages. Hardy has lived. In living, like every other man or woman of genius, perhaps indeed like any man or woman God sees fit to create, he has

*BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE*

changed the world a little—merely by living and working in it. Is not that enough ?

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## THOMAS HARDY OF THE WESSEX NOVELS

### I.

The Greek philosopher who observed that one cannot bathe twice in the same river might, I think, have added with almost equal truth that one cannot read twice in the same book. Our sentiments on reperusing any piece of imaginative writing after a lapse of some years are pretty sure to differ considerably from those of the first reading, and it will be much to the credit of the author if, in spite of this, there is no abatement in our admiration for him. That, of course, is the glory of the greater writers: they delight at almost any age or stage, being themselves so rich in the elemental human qualities as to awaken a response in the simplest natures, and at the same time so full of deeper suggestions that the experience of life only adds to one's appreciation of them. Something of this virtue is, I think, to be found in Hardy,

THOMAS HARDY

or at least in a great part of his work: he may be read at almost any decade of one's life, and however much one's estimate of him will vary in certain respects, he will yet always prove interesting and enjoyable. He is, that is to say, a popular writer in the best sense of the term, and in any consideration of his work this ought constantly to be borne in mind, for it is, after all, the matter of chief consequence. It indicates that he possesses the most important quality of all — something that appeals to the simple and unlearned whose criticism is really, when all is said, the last word down the ages; one can only call it the quality of humanity. In a great part of what he has written it would be easy enough for an unsophisticated reader to overlook the author's knowledge, observation, philosophy, and purpose; one might read and re-read him for the mere pleasure of the story and never see, consciously and definitely, that he meant anything special at all. And it would be difficult to pay him a higher compliment.

This, then is the first point to insist upon — that his novels are admirable merely as

novels, by virtue of their engrossing incident and capable characterisation. His plots, at their best, are excellent: they do not affect us as any arbitrary arrangement of chance events, but as an inevitable development; and his characters inspire us with interest, sympathy, and belief, in spite of all the surprising things that they do. It is impossible for the reader to forecast their actions, which, indeed, often come upon him with something of a shock, and yet, as the narrative proceeds, he feels that they could not have done anything else in the circumstances, and that we are all of us behaving in much the same unaccountable fashion. The fact is, perhaps, that Hardy has the rare courage to show us people with the ordinary share of human inconsistency. We are so accustomed to find characters in plays and novels portrayed with a conventional inconsistency which they would be very unlikely to have in real life, that we often exclaim involuntarily at the amazing real inconsistencies of the Hardy men and women. But when we have finished and laid aside the book, the curious final summing-up that always in such cases comes

THOMAS HARDY

to us unsought, like a kind of aftertaste, assures us that his characters have behaved no more foolishly than ordinary mortals such as ourselves would have done in their place. They are, perhaps, more unworldly than the general run of folks, but yet if we had been isolated on Egdon Heath, far from the demoralising influences of modern civilisation, we, too, might have given over as trustfully as they our packages, our bags of money, our compromising letters, to be carried to their destination by semi-idiotic or mischievous messengers.

I have referred to these obvious and essential qualities of the novelist, because they seem to be frequently overlooked by our super-subtle modern critics. And indeed it is natural enough that in such an introspective age as this we should fasten our attention mainly upon other aspects of Hardy's work, which make a more intimate, if less universal, appeal. The attraction exercised by him on his contemporaries resides, I think, not so much in his literary or intellectual gifts as in his personality, though of course the latter is inherent in the former, and cannot well

*OF THE WESSEX NOVELS*

be separated from them. No one, for instance, could fairly call Hardy a master of style, and yet his style is profoundly characteristic and significant: if it lacks the charm of formal beauty it has that rarer attribute, sincerity. In reading him, we cannot help feeling that he has always had plenty to say, and that his only difficulty has been how to say it justly. Between his thought and the expression of it there is a space—a hiatus. He does, like Balzac, manage to express it in the end and in such a way that you know he has said what he wants to say and nothing else, but you also feel that the accomplishment of it was not easy. You would not, in the first instance, think of calling either Balzac or Hardy a literary artist, and yet there are moments when both say what they have to say as no mere master of style could ever do. And even if, at the time of reading, certain parts of them suggest an unnatural strain, yet in afterwards thinking over what they say one finds that oddly enough the unnatural partial feeling has vanished in the remembrance of a natural whole.

THOMAS HARDY

Again, it may be said that the scientific spirit, which has been such a ruling force in these latter times, is strongly represented in Hardy, and there would no doubt be some truth in the contention. Of the knowledge displayed in his books I need say little; its range is extraordinarily wide, and he always convinces us that it is solid and extremely accurate. Whether he speaks of stellar worlds, the history of architecture, theological controversy, the swarming of bees, the operation of swede-hacking, the working of a threshing-machine, or the planting of trees, it never occurs to us to doubt him for a moment; and intellectual attainments of this kind undoubtedly have their value for us. So, too, his power of observation is one of his most remarkable gifts, and deserves a much fuller discussion than I can give it here: the pre-eminent merit of his observation, especially as applied to natural objects, is its absolute spontaneity—its freedom from self-consciousness and effort. It is so entirely a part of himself that it never affects us as in any sense a distinct appendage to his work—as, for example, is the case with Thackeray now and then, or

*OF THE WESSEX NOVELS*

with George Eliot after the time when scholarship had laid its icy hands upon her. But, after all, what chiefly attracts so many of us to Hardy is neither his style nor his knowledge, nor his observation, so much as the temperament by which these are coloured. He is emphatically what we choose to call a modern type, and very characteristic of our own age; he is, to some small extent at least, the kind of author who is for all time, because he is so distinctively and narrowly for one little period. If his books do live, readers of a later date will hardly like them for the things that we now like best in them. To us he says just those things that are distinctive of our own unrestful, "modern" as we call it, age. In his later novels, of course, he set out consciously to address his own time, and immediately impaired the effect of his message—we cannot hear him nearly so clearly because he shouts so loud; but in his earlier work this is not so. There we get the very spirit of the age—the spirit of troubled questioning and quick sympathy, together with the underlying suggestion of belief in happiness and beauty, if only he had been

allowed to keep it. But he was not robust enough to stand against the battering and blows of this modern life of ours; his very virtues betrayed him, and he succumbed. And here I must just try to indicate Hardy's view of life, and its effect upon his work both for good and evil.

II.

If only Hardy had been born in a happier period he might, I think, have passed his life in tolerable content; he would not have been driven to the vain endeavour of getting behind the causes of things. In his earlier books he seems to show himself as a simple enough nature on the top, possessed of primitive emotions and a wonderful sense of community with all living things—a sympathy that gives him a genuine understanding of humanity. But this is no age for such natures: they have to become what is called “stronger”, whether they will or no. That is to say, they suffer till in self-defence they take to thinking intellectually in order to find some way out of the evil, and the disease of think-

OF THE WESSEX NOVELS

ing spreads and permeates their whole being, until nothing seems left but painful sympathy for others, and patient endurance for themselves.

Hardy's view of life is never, even in the earliest works, a happy one. He looks on happiness not as the chief end of life, but as something that must be flung aside at the call of duty, or crushed out in the fearful competition of existence. He can never quite escape from this sense of doom and gloom. Even his brightest things remind us of one of those gray days when all the actual sunlight we can see is just a fleck or dapple here and there—like the wood into which Grace Melbury drove with her father when she came down to tea with the workers. It is very exquisite and charming, and a bit of real life, but it is uncertain and tremulous, never radiant, and never possessing even for a flash that feeling of assurance, of accomplishment, —of such enjoyment that for the moment there is no conscious feeling at all, the sense of personality being merged into something infinite. He has, indeed, stood near enough to get a glimpse of the vision, to see the

THOMAS HARDY

possibilities: but that is all. We touch here, I think, Hardy's chief limitation, which prevents him, in spite of his admirable courage and sincerity, from claiming a place among the really great writers: he has no hearty, ungrudging belief either in himself or in his fellows. Look at his characters, and you will find that he represents them honestly and impartially, as he sees them; and what he sees is that life deals harshly with them, and that they are hardened by their misfortunes and not softened and made exquisite by them. It is no doubt true enough, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, but it is open to one to maintain that the hundredth case is worth all the others, and *that* he never gives us. Gabriel, Giles, and Diggory are the nearest approaches to this kind of nature, but even they lacked the quality of eager and ardent giving. They were gentle, they were resigned; one *admires* them more than almost any other characters in contemporary fiction, but they had not the quality that makes one *love*, let us say, *Othello* or *Desdemona*. They were passive and not active in their virtues; they could bear, and bear without reproach-

ing, but I am not sure if they could have killed the fatted calf with a very cordial alacrity, and had dancing and music at the return of the prodigal. They would, no doubt, have forgiven him all right, but one can't help suspecting that the festival would have been a very quiet one, and would just have lacked the one impulse of the spirit that makes the doors of one's heart fly open at a touch. And so Hardy arouses in us the strongest feelings of admiration, respect, pity, and intellectual sympathy, but he never gives us that feeling of *expansion* which many authors can awaken by quite inferior technical means and which, when truly achieved, is the crown of art.

It is difficult to suggest the truth of this matter in words, but perhaps I may indicate what I mean by saying that Hardy lacks the quality of enthusiasm in the widest as well as in the literal sense of the word. The great, helpful people—those who stir one, I will not say to action, but even to any desire for action—all have it, though of course in very different ways. There is a quiet and thoughtful enthusiasm, for instance, like Maeter-

THOMAS HARDY

linck's, an exuberant one, like Dickens's, a grave and ascetic one, like Tolstoy, and so on, but Hardy has none of them, and he sometimes seems conscious of the want in himself. No whole-hearted happiness is possible to him, and so his genius is always of the negative rather than the positive order. His heart never gives him any joyful assurance—not indeed that all's right with the world, for that is, perhaps, too much to ask, but that in spite of all the wrong in it God is still in His Heaven. He is always haunted by something more than a suspicion that God is not in His heaven, and tormented by the extremely unsatisfying attempt to read the riddle of this painful earth, and he certainly never comes to Friar Lawrence's conclusion that Nature's tears are reason's merriment. His world is full of beauty, sympathy, delicate perception, tenderness, and tolerance, but it is not inspiring or invigorating.

Perhaps, in this connection, I may mention Hardy's humour, for I think that it illustrates the limitation of which I have spoken. It seems, on the face of things, ridiculous to say that Hardy is lacking in the sense of

*OF THE WESSEX NOVELS*

humour, and yet I believe that there is a certain truth in the contention. For, delightful as it is, his humour is almost always of the grim kind: it is restrictive and not expansive—it is really only another aspect of his painfulness. He himself expresses what I mean when he says, in speaking of the manifestations of drunkenness of Tess's father, that like most comical effects it was not so very comic after all. Now there, I think, he is wrong, and that is his limitation, for of course it would be just as reasonable to assert that most tragical effects are not so very tragic after all, comedy and tragedy being really only different aspects of the same thing. But he is not large enough to accept without qualification the joyous and humorous things of life, as the greatest artists do; there is something saturnine about his effects even when he is dealing with his imitable rustics. Their sentiment and phraseology are beautifully rendered, but somehow they lack the electric touch, and fail to evoke the response of affection in the way that the comic characters of Dickens, for example, do—not to speak of those of Shake-

THOMAS HARDY

speare. He can never abandon himself to a whole-hearted delight in them; in fact, one almost feels that his readers may get more real enjoyment out of them that he has done himself—an inconceivable supposition in the case of these other writers. But it is ungrateful even to hint at any limitation of humour in an author who has given us such deliciously humorous scenes as may be found in "Under the Greenwood Tree," or "Far from the Madding Crowd," or some other of the early novels, and I have done this merely in order to illustrate my main argument. Of its own kind, Hardy's humour is superlatively good, and when, once in a way, he happens to be in a holiday mood, as, for example, in the "Trumpet-Major," he can be very delightful. And considering that nothing shows up a "cultured" or a vulgar nature so quickly and fatally as a holiday mood, that is very high praise.

III.

I have noted a few of what appear to me to be the more salient of Hardy's general

## OF THE WESSEX NOVELS

characteristics, and I should like now to see if I can trace, very roughly, the lines on which they would seem, from a more detailed consideration of his work, to have developed. The evolution of an author's genius has generally some interest, if for nothing else, at least as affording a comment upon his period.

One might, I think, divide Hardy's novels into three phases, though, of course, the division would have no absolutely strict relation to the actual dates at which they were written. In the first phase, of which "Under the Greenwood Tree," and "Far from the Madding Crowd" are the best examples, we make the acquaintance of his men and women while they are young, hopeful, and ready to meet halfway the happiness which every healthy human being feels to be his right; yet even at this early stage we are already conscious of a certain tremulous doubt underlying the hopefulness and eagerness. It is a feeling intensely characteristic of our modern civilised world, in which the old hearty zest of existence is almost unknown even among the youthful and inexperienced, being replaced as Hardy remarks, by the view

## THOMAS HARDY

of life as a thing to be put up with, though of course the instinctive impulse towards joy still remains. Yet the characters in these early books are able to battle against such depressing influences, and to win at least a partial success. Gabriel and Bathsheba have, indeed, at the end of the novel, suffered too keenly ever to show again the radiance of that brittle thing we call happiness, but we feel that they are fast friends, and that their future lives will be passed in contentment together; and though Dick and Fancy give promise of a somewhat chequered career, still they have health and good humour and will probably get on tolerably well after all. Most readers, I think, will regard these books as the most enjoyable that Hardy has written.

The transition to the second phase is taken in the "Return of the Native," which shows Hardy for the first time in full command of his method and technique. It is a wonderfully fine novel and indeed I should, for my own part, have little hesitation in selecting it and the other two chief representatives of the second period — "The Mayor of Casterbridge," and "The Woodlanders" — as his

## OF THE WESSEX NOVELS

greatest achievements in fiction. In this phase the general rule is that his men and women expect from the beginning very little of life. They regard it, on the whole, as a tragic thing; moments of gaiety they look upon as interludes, and as no part of the actual drama, and light-heartedness seems to them too irrational and inconsequent to be indulged in, except as an intoxicating draught now and then. They are cumbered from the beginning with care, anxiety, foreboding. No sooner do they form a desire than it seems to them scarcely worth their trouble to attempt to satisfy it; yet they are not despairing—in many instances not even actually suffering: and out of their philosophy they manage in the end to extract a bitter-sweet tonic for workaday life. One feels sure that later on the best of Hardy's men and women—of this secondary phase—will find scope for their energies in discovering to their narrow-lived neighbours the secret which they themselves have learned at the fountain-spring of life—“the secret of making limited opportunities endurable.” This they deem to consist “in the cunning enlargement, by a species of

THOMAS HARDY

microscopic treatment, of those minute forms of satisfaction that offer themselves to everybody not in positive pain; which, thus handled, have much of the same inspiring effect on life as wider interests cursorily embraced."

Just as soon as any human being seeks any reasoned form of consolation, we may take it for granted either that he has himself eaten of the apple of the tree of life, or that his forbears have eaten of it so inordinately that he has come into the world with an incurable mental indigestion. And one must confess that the deliberate placing of tiny pleasures under the microscope is at best a negative, rather than a positive, kind of happiness. It is in no way an adequate philosophy of life, yet one cannot but feel a genuine respect for it and for its followers. If it lacks the exuberant quality of joy, it may achieve the still serenity of contentment. And it has at least the transcendent merit of sincerity.

Thus, in spite of their subdued lights, the novels of this and the earlier stage cannot fairly be called depressing. Hardy manages to enlist our sympathy with his characters:

we like them all the better for their mistakes, their shortcomings, weaknesses, and follies. They seem close to ourselves, and we should like to help them if we could. He contrives somehow to suggest our utter dependence on one another, our general kinship; and it is the sense he gives us of great forces at work behind us, blind and indifferent though they may possibly be, of humanity striving even against overwhelming odds, of frail mortals thrown into the world with nothing enduring to hold them together but the links of tenderness and sympathy, that saves his books from being genuinely depressing. Melancholy and pathetic he can indeed be, almost unbearably so at times, as when Elisabeth finds too late Henchard's pitiful little wedding-gift to her—the cage with the dead bird inside. But the pathos of "A Pair of Blue Eyes," and the sadness of the story of Giles Winterborne and Marty South do not in the least affect us with the dreariness, the sense of aridity, that comes upon us in reading certain works by authors of our modern schools. Such studies of character as one finds in many of our "realists," "express-

THOMAS HARDY

ionists," etc. make one gloomy, angry, disgusted, and all the more so that one cannot positively say they are actually false to life; they represent the truth as a bad photograph does a fine face. Hardy's people, however, at their very worst are human—men and women of like passions with ourselves, and however futile their lives may seem to be in his presentation of them, we find a certain consolations in the mere fact of their being at least partially beautiful.

The transition to the third phase, which is represented by the latest novels, "Tess," "Jude the Obscure," "The Well-Beloved," and "Life's Little Ironies," may be seen in the gradual preponderance of the author's power of understanding over his power of affection, with the result that we get something at once bigger and smaller than before—a more intensely intellectualised, but less loving sympathy. In this final phase his men and women have taken a further step. They have stopped placing tiny pleasures under the microscope, and tend rather to keep on looking at large pleasures through the wrong end of the glass, brooding upon them

## OF THE WESSEX NOVELS

so fixedly that they cease to be able to enjoy them at all. They come to the point of view of Little Father Time in "Jude," who "would like flowers very, very much, if he didn't keep on thinking they'd all be withered in a few days." Even when we first meet them we recognize in them a lack of the capacity for healthy enjoyment: they may not be exactly unhappy, but their vitality is low, and they face difficulties, from the beginning, not like a strong swimmer who breasts the waves eagerly, but like an exhausted man who seizes on any spar and clings to it doggedly, desperately, as the one thing between him and extinction.

As the later books work out, we see both the men and the women awaking, through a long series of brutalising misfortunes, to a keen sense of resentment, and finally, as their power of resistance grows weaker and weaker, sinking into a dull, lethargic despair. Yet even in their last and bitterest state they share one great virtue—the supreme virtue of courage. Once they have taken the fatal step, they endure the consequences in silence; they recognise that, having, however un-

THOMAS HARDY

wittingly, sown the wind, they must reap the whirlwind. They do not indeed accept misfortune in the exquisite spirit of Desdemona—their courage is that of the Stoic rather than the Christian. The supreme consolation is denied them; and precisely because it is impossible for them ever to reconcile themselves wholly again with life and humanity, the feeling they arouse in us is admiration, respect, compassion, but never the unreasoning, all-accepting love in which they themselves are lacking.

Much of this later work of Hardy's is unpleasant, and sometimes even cruel. The pity is that it should be so much more widely known than the admirable and much more genuinely sympathetic novels of the earlier period. But "*Tess*" and "*Jude*" have had a *succès de désapprobation*, which always goes a good deal further than a *succès d'estime*, and the consequence is that he is judged principally by them, though they are really almost the least attractive of his books. We may respect them, but we do not enjoy them: we enjoy Hardy (and, for that matter, any other author) in proportion as he has en-

## OF THE WESSEX NOVELS

joyed himself in writing what we read. Now, no one could deny that there is an enormous amount of good, solid work in "Tess" and "Jude," and no one could refuse to allow a great deal of merit to some of the less important characters; but it is impossible to take pleasure in either book, and one is drawn, almost in spite of oneself, to a critical view of them, for the reason, I imagine, that they have been written without the genuine emotion that produced the earlier novels. They are emotional in a sense, of course, for they both have their origin in the sympathy felt by the author at beholding the injustice of the world; but the emotion has been forced into a purely intellectual sphere, and consciously kept there — it has not been unconsciously absorbed by his whole nature, and allowed to become an essential part of himself before finding expression.

Thus in these later novels Hardy commits the great sin against art—that of writing to the order of a philosophy of life instead of to the order of life itself. If one takes "Tess," for instance, one cannot help feeling that the heroine, in spite of all the care that has

THOMAS HARDY

been expended upon her, is not a real woman, but a figure set up to illustrate a theory. It is interesting to compare the novel with two other famous works in which a somewhat similar theme is dealt with—Tolstoy's "Resurrection," and Mrs. Browning's "Aurora Leigh." Hardy has not shown the courage of Tolstoy in the presentation of his heroine. Tess would never have remained as he depicts her; she would have sunk morally and physically—and afterwards, perhaps, have risen higher—if she had been real. Think of Maslova, and how absolutely we believe Tolstoy, both when he shows her to us degraded and debased by life, and then, at the last, raised up by the Kingdom of God within herself. If one writes a novel with a purpose at all (a conscious moral, I mean, of course), Tolstoy's seems to me the way to do it. In making Maslova love Nekludov, he gives the right feeling both to himself and his readers, while Hardy alienates all one's sympathy from Tess at the beginning by not even granting her the right to love his incredible and horrible D'Urberville, and by allowing her to christen her child, "Sorrow."

Surely, if she had been the sort of woman she is represented to be, she would have been far more likely to accept her baby as a healing gift, and to find comfort in it. Compare her attitude with that of Marian in the very similar episode in "Aurora Leigh." Tess is by far the more realistic of the two figures, but Marian is by far the more real. Tess is drawn very carefully and intellectually, Marian often carelessly, but always with the essential truth given by the knowledge of actual experience. Hardy has played the part of observer astonishingly well, and has built up his pure woman from the outside inwards, as his brain instructed him; Mrs. Browning did not consciously observe at all, but created her large-souled woman from the inside outwards, as she *knew* her to be from the feeling of her own heart. One could not easily get a better contrast between the two schools of writing, for Tess, the creation of the brain, is wonderfully true in almost every respect, and Marian, the creation of the heart, ridiculously untrue to life in all the ordinary circumstances. And yet there is little doubt, I think, as to which is the essentially true

*THOMAS HARDY*

woman of the two. Hardy has missed the one thing that would have instinctively marked the kind of woman he is telling us about, and so, in spite of many redeeming touches, she strikes us as an intellectual abstraction. And Marian, with her impossible way of speaking, her impossible refinement, and her impossible power of discrimination, has just the one thing that a real woman of her type would have had, and thus convinces us that, in spite of all these incongruities, she was—is—a real, breathing, living creature. And in the artistic world it is this power of presenting reality, in distinction to realism, that is the one indispensable thing: without it the artist, though he may understand all mysteries and all knowledge, is as nothing.

IV.

If we look at the work of the three novelists who held the chief rank in England during the latter years of last century—Meredith, Hardy, and Kipling—we shall find, I think, that the same thing happened to them all, affecting the talent of each in its own way: they all, to a greater or less extent,

lost the power of enjoyment, satisfaction, happiness, in creating. They continued to create; in all three the brain did its work as well as ever, if not better, but the vital part of the process—the instinctive pleasure in the act of creation—declined. In all of them, as they mature, we find increasingly that joylessness which has been the characteristic of the time from which we are, perhaps, just beginning to emerge; in all of them the natural, nonchalant rightness of the happy, not too conscious artist, is replaced by the laboured, technical accuracy of the self-conscious artificer. It is this that makes their later things, as a general rule, so difficult to enjoy honestly: we are filled with admiration at the cleverness they exhibit, but somehow or other the admiration rarely mellows into affection. It would almost seem as if even the very able people (all but the very greatest of them, at least) had only a comparatively slender vein of emotional experience to work, and that, so far as creative art is concerned, they had better relapse into silence when once that vein has been exhausted. For,

THOMAS HARDY

however great the intellectual power may be, it is not sufficient by itself; and except in the case of poets and artists of the first order, the emotional power is apt to die while the intellectual endures and continues its activity. Or, at any rate, it would seem as if this were of frequent occurrence in our own time, and in that preceding it; it is strikingly apparent in these three novelists, who, in their different ways, represent very markedly the prevailing spirit—the virtues and the weaknesses—of their period. To all of them time brought a restriction rather than an expansion of their talent. Meredith, of course, went on growing to the last, and Hardy went on growing, too, but it is a one-sided growth. Meredith tended in later life to look at things more and more exclusively from an intellectual stand-point (one has only to contrast the behaviour of Lucy with that of Carinthia Jane, to see how even his women changed their point of view), and probably this will account to a considerable extent for the obscurity of his later style; he had got into the habit of looking at simple things in a complicated

## OF THE WESSEX NOVELS

way, and so made them difficult to understand—he went up high instead of going down deep. After all, one must have *felt* a thing before one can begin to think about it to any purpose, and to analyse and describe it, and though Meredith felt keenly and suffered much, yet in later life his great intellectual power seems to have gone on growing without fusing and making itself one with the feeling and suffering.

As to Kipling, he certainly has not become too intellectual in the Meredithian sense, but in him also there is observable the same loss of connection with the vitalising power of art. He, too, took to working with the intellect, but in quite a different way: if Meredith became restricted through what is almost an excess of good taste—became over-aestheticised until everything he showed you came to have a kind of crystalline look to it—Kipling fell into another snare of our age: he became commercialised—he inclined, that is, to take a thoroughly commercial view of life and its aims, and this essentially limiting and inexpansive philosophy of his has in the

THOMAS HARDY

end overcome the vital and admirably vivid qualities of his earlier tales.<sup>1</sup>

With Hardy, the intellectualism took another and a nobler form. It has manifested itself in a philosophic sympathy, almost amounting to prejudice, with the sufferings of humanity, an intent and conscious pre-occupation with the injustices of life. It may appear paradoxical to say, in the face of this, that his later work is divorced from feeling, and yet in a sense it is so: it does not spring from direct emotional experience, but sets out to illustrate a preconceived theory of life. Yet it may be said, I think, that Hardy's conception is nearer to the needs, and more in accordance with the real spirit of our age than that of his brother artists. The sense of growing fellowship which is one of the

<sup>1</sup> And yet it seems a bad way to pay a debt of unnumbered years of often rapturous enjoyment, to speak of Rudyard Kipling like this. I may be — probably am — wrong. But what can one say but what one thinks? And what I say here, however presuming it may sound, I say with all sincerity — and with apologies. No one can be deeper in the earlier Kipling's debt than I: and my tribute is to genius.

J. G. S.

*OF THE WESSEX NOVELS*

redeeming qualities of the present time, and which we will hope may spread into ever fuller consciousness, is very strong in him, and gives a peculiar value to his work. Hardy, in fact, is a democrat, in the best sense of the word, Meredith is an aristocrat, and Kipling is a demagogue. And while the old exclusive ideals of aristocracy have lost ground until they are disappearing from our modern world, while the individualistic and imperialistic ideals are at least made to do battle for their continued existence, democracy, in one form or another and both for good and evil, is more alive and more integrally a part of life to-day than ever.



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

J. G. (J. Georgina) Sime was born in Scotland, but moved early with her parents to London, England, where she grew up. Her father was James Sime, author of "The Life of Lessing," etc.; her mother was also before marriage a writer; and Miss Sime is great-niece both of Mrs. Oliphant, the English novelist, and of Sir Daniel Wilson, for long Professor at and later Principal of Toronto University. The fact of this latter relationship was, until she crossed the ocean, Miss Sime's one link with the Dominion.

She was educated at home but, before going to Germany to study music, she attended for a year or so lectures at Queen's College, London. She worked at music in Berlin for three years with the intention of becoming a public singer — a career she followed for a time; then giving this up, she first helped her father who was at this time Reader to the Macmillan Publishing Firm, with the lighter

## THOMAS HARDY

side of his work, assisting him with the fiction, Travels, etc., that were sent to him for his selection; then, beginning to write for herself, she contributed short stories to various magazines, did reviewing for the *Athenaeum*, contributed for a time a weekly column to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and worked at translations, both from the German and the French. In all this work she was aided, not only by her father but by George War-rington Steevens, author of "With Kitchener to Khartoum," etc.; and it is Miss Sime's habit to say that she could never express how much she owes to this brilliant writer—dead, alas, too young—who helped her to place her work, and, more important still, never tired of assisting her in the shaping of the thought she was as yet too inexperienced to be able to express. Later than this, when Miss Sime was living in Edinburgh, Scotland for a year or two, she herself acted as Reader to the Firm of Nelson and Company. She spent, at different times, considerable periods both in France and Italy.

In 1907 Miss Sime came to Canada, and in this new country all her books have been

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

written. They are : — *Rainbow Lights* (Duckworth); *The Mistress of All Work* (Methuen); *Canada Chaps*, written during the War (John Lane); *Sister Woman* (Grant Richards); *Our Little Life* (Grant Richards in England, and the Frederick A. Stokes Company in New York). While in Canada Miss Sime has written short stories and essays, published in Magazines on both sides of the Atlantic; also one or two one-act plays, not published. For the past six years she has spoken extensively, both in Canada and the United States, her subjects being studies of famous men and women, both living and dead. Her lectures she calls *Vignettes, Literary Portraits*; or sometimes, *Studies in Three Dimensions*.

Her intentions for the future are, in common with all those who aspire to write, manifold and extensive. Of the schemes she has in view, one is a book in dialogue — a form which has fascinated her from the early days when she read with admiration and delight the works of the now out-dated "Gyp"; an Anthology, on a subject which constantly keeps her amused; a collection of

THOMAS HARDY

Essays on varying topics; an account of a miniature world she had the joy of observing and noting down during a summer spent in French-Canada: together with other more ambitious schemes. The present Essay on Thomas Hardy appeared originally in the Westminster Review, over a pen-name sometimes used by Miss Sime, "Jacob Salviris." It now re-appears revised, and accompanied by a Biographical Note.

Miss Sime is Vice-President for the Province of Quebec of the Canadian Women's Press Club; Past-President of the Montreal Branch of the Authors' Association; and President of the Montreal Centre of the International Club for Authors, "The P. E. N. Club", founded in London, England, by John Galsworthy, now possessing Centres in more than thirty countries in Europe, Canada, and North and South America; and of which Thomas Hardy was, by common consent some years ago, elected Honorary Member for England.

L. C.



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